

# 12 screening tests women need

## Got health?

Protect it with regular screenings. These tests can alert your doctor to the earliest signs of major health threats, such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and osteoporosis.

And the added incentive for being diligent: Early detection almost always means simpler, more effective treatment.

## What's right for you

Though all women need regular screenings, every woman's schedule won't be the same. Women with some risk factors, such as family history of a disease, will need screenings earlier and more often.

## Tests that make the grade

### 1. Pelvic exam

Your provider examines the reproductive organs.

**First test:** Age 21, or earlier if you are sexually active.

**Repeat tests:** Annually.

### 2. Pap test

Usually done during a pelvic exam, this test looks for abnormal or cancerous cells in the cervix.

**First test:** Age 21.

**Repeat tests:** Depends on your age and health history. Check with your doctor.

### 3. Chlamydia

This tests for a common sexually transmitted disease.

**First test:** When you become sexually active.

**Repeat tests:** Annually until age 24, then as your doctor advises.

### 4. Mammogram

This X-ray can find signs of breast cancer.

**First test:** Age 40.

**Repeat tests:** Annually.

### 5. Cholesterol

This blood test looks at the various types and amounts of fatty material you have in your blood. Unhealthy numbers could add up to trouble for your heart.

**First test:** Age 20.

**Repeat tests:** As your doctor advises.

### 6. Blood pressure

This test detects high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

**First test:** Age 20.

**Repeat tests:** Every two years or more frequently, if readings are high.

### 7. Colorectal cancer

There are several ways to screen for signs of colorectal cancer.

**First test:** Age 50, although women who are African-American should be screened at age 45. Women who have a family history of colorectal cancer may need to be screened earlier, as well.

**Repeat tests:** It can depend on the test. Ask your doctor.

### 8. Diabetes

A blood test can measure your blood sugar level and indicate your risk for diabetes.

**First test:** Age 45.

**Repeat tests:** Every three years.

### 9. Bone mineral density

Doctors use X-rays to check for signs of bone loss or osteoporosis.

**First test:** Age 65, but discuss with your doctor around your 50th birthday.

**Repeat tests:** Ask your doctor.

### 10. Depression

A series of tests can determine if you're experiencing this common psychiatric disorder.

**Testing:** If feelings of sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, or emptiness persist more than two weeks, talk to your primary care provider about screening.

### 11. Skin exam

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States, and self-exams are the first step for finding it. Check your entire body every month for spots or moles that are asymmetrical, have irregular borders or colors, are larger around than a pencil eraser, or have changed in any way. Also note any other changes in your skin's appearance or sensation (itchiness, tenderness, pain). If you notice anything, talk to your doctor.

**First test:** Age 20.

**Repeat tests:** Every month.

### 12. Eye exam

Regular eye exams can detect diseases at an early stage.

**First test:** Age 40, if you have not had a recent eye exam.

**Repeat tests:** Every two to four years; after 55, every one to three years; after 65, every one to two years (or as your doctor advises).

Sources: American Academy of Family Physicians; American Cancer Society; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## Still the best medicine

As essential as these various screenings are, the first step toward good health is healthy living:

**Don't smoke.** If you smoke cigarettes, quitting should be your first priority. It will reduce your risks for heart disease, stroke, cancer, osteoporosis, early menopause, vision loss, and early facial aging.

**Eat well every day.** A healthful diet based on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat sources of protein and calcium helps protect you from heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes. It also offers more energy; a better mood; a slimmer figure; and healthier skin, teeth, and eyes.

**Make exercise a habit.** Whether you walk, swim, bicycle, garden, or do aerobics, physical activity can improve your health in almost too many ways to count. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends 30 minutes of activity on most days of the week.

**Take time out.** Make time for yourself. Stay in touch with the people you care about, do things that make you happy, get enough sleep, and find healthful, effective ways to deal with stress.

**Check with your doctor.** Again, talk to your doctor about the screening schedule that's best for safeguarding your health.

## Make the most of your doctor visit

The best medical care comes from a partnership between you and your doctor. These pointers can help you do your part:

- Bring a list of your health concerns. Describe your symptoms clearly, including when they began, what triggers them, what (if anything) relieves them, and how they make you feel.
- Tell your doctor about every medicine or remedy — prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal — that you take.
- Be honest about your lifestyle, including your diet; physical activity; whether you smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs; and your sexual history.
- Don't be afraid to ask about anything. Doctors are used to hearing about sensitive issues. Bring a list if it helps, and don't worry about taking up too much time. Schedule a second appointment if you need to.
- Make sure you understand everything. Try writing things down or bringing a trusted friend or family member to serve as a second set of ears. If there's something you don't understand, ask your doctor to repeat it.

Source: National Women's Health Information Center

To find a physician on the Methodist Health System medical staff or for more information about scheduling a screening test, call 214-947-0000 or [MethodistHealthSystem.org](http://MethodistHealthSystem.org).